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SUBJECT: CORDIAL FIRST MEETING WITH NEW BOLIVIAN INTERIOR MINISTER

REF: 10 LA PAZ 35

CLASSIFIED BY: William Mozdierz, Acting Deputy Chief of Mission,  
State, La Paz; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: The ChrgC) met February 4 with new Bolivian Interior Minister Sacha Llorenti for a surprisingly cordial one-hour exchange. Llorenti, a frequent critic of the U.S. and reportedly close to hard-line Vice President Garcia Linera, underscored his interest in working closely with us on counter-narcotics and bilateral relations, acknowledged challenges facing Bolivian security force in terms of professionalization, and offered assistance in addressing problems we have had in securing visas for military personnel. Llorenti inquired about the pending GOB extradition request of former President "Goni" Sanchez de Lozada and highlighted concerns about Bolivian suspects obtaining refuge in the U.S. and Peru. The new minister's message and tone in this first meeting were remarkably positive given his role and reputation. End summary.

¶2. (C) Llorenti pledged to work closely with the United States on counter-narcotics efforts, confirmed the GOB goal of eradicating 7000 hectares of illegal coca this year (though acknowledging that heavy rains have pushed back their ambitious schedule), and expressed interest in joining Vice Minister Caceres and resident ambassadors for a NAS-supported trip to the Chapare coca-growing region February 22. Llorenti characterized Bolivian police forces as well trained and professional, but allowed that challenges remain in reducing corruption, promoting greater respect for human rights and addressing what he described as a crisis in the penal system.

¶3. (C) Llorenti, who participated in earlier rounds of talks on a bilateral framework agreement, declared himself extremely pleased with the progress made to date and wondered how we could "unfreeze" the process to reach a final agreement. The ChrgC) recalled our discussions with FM Choquehuanca on the eve of Morales's inauguration January 22. He explained that we support talks, but noted that it would be helpful to have something in writing from the GOB outlining their concerns and position.

¶4. (C) Llorenti inquired about the "Goni" extradition request, asking when the GOB would get an answer. He claimed that the

Bolivian embassy has sent three diplomatic notes to State and has not gotten a reply. The ChargC) said he understood that an answer should be forthcoming, and underscored that the request will be decided on legal, not political, grounds.

15. (C) Llorenti sought to convince us that the 2009 case of alleged separatist terrorists (the "Rozsa case") represented a real threat to Bolivia's security. Without going into details (nor mentioning the prosecutor's finding of a CIA connection in the case, which would be revealed a few days later, reftel), he made clear that the GOB intends to pursue this case vigorously. Llorenti highlighted GOB concerns about criminal suspects winding up abroad, principally in the U.S. and Peru, beyond the reach of Bolivian authorities. The flight to the U.S. of former presidential candidate Manfred Reyes Villa is one such case, Llorenti noted, indicating that the GOB will pursue a formal extradition request for Reyes Villa.

16. (C) The ChargC) raised with Llorenti the challenges we have faced in recent months getting visas for DoD officials and military, including lengthy delays and even denials. He indicated that we understand that such visas are held up in the Interior Ministry, and requested the minister's assistance in ensuring that the visas are adjudicated quickly. Llorenti (who appeared unaware of the problem) immediately pledged his assistance in making sure that all diplomatic staff, including military and U.S. marine security guards, get their visas approved. On the way out, Llorenti made a point of asking the ChargC) that copies of such requests be sent to his office directly, to ensure they will be taken care of.

17. (C) Comment: Throughout this initial exchange, Llorenti was soft-spoken and respectful. Although clearly still becoming familiar with his new responsibilities and issues, he repeatedly emphasized his interest in working with the U.S. and declared himself always available to us. Who knows how long it will last, but this was a far more constructive first meeting than we otherwise could have hoped for. End comment.  
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